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ABSTRACT

This paper portrays community colleges as American institutions facing a critical need for self-assessment, especially as the new millennium approaches and effects an ever-increasing reliance on technology and information. Focusing on organizational sustainability, a generative method for change is described that emphasizes processes, team learning, and strategic choice. An essential part of integrating change into higher education is to challenge the traditional assumptions of college missions as well as the established perspectives regarding the assessment of organizational quality and effectiveness. Accountability, effectiveness, and assessment are key terms related to educational change, prompting the (1) establishment of an expanded statement of institutional purpose; (2) identification of intended educational, research, service, and administrative objectives and outcomes; (3) assessment of the extent to which the intended objectives and outcomes are being accomplished; and (4) adjustment of institutional mission, objectives, and outcomes based on the assessment findings. Included is a case study of Hagerstown Community College (Maryland), a list of statistical outcomes, and a conclusion with new responses toward accountability. (15 references) (AS)

HOLD THAT TIGER:
PLACEMENT, ASSESSMENT STRATEGIES,
AND STUDENT LEARNING

Fifth Annual
Celebrating Learning:
A Community College Showcase

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Introduction: Changing Contexts, Shifting Scenarios

The 21st century is an ever nearer reality! Analysts, futurists, and "seers" are creating a cacophony attempting to assess the meaning of the millennium. Nadler, Shaw, Walton, et al., of the Delta Consulting Group, New York, accept that change will be the rule rather than the exception and that it will have a major impact on organizational survival. From their work with numerous public and private sector businesses and agencies they have developed a strategy for engaging change. The process is described as "generative." The objective is organizational sustainability. It focuses on processes, team learning, and strategic choice. The design can be tailored to the specific missions of the business or agency. The essential outcome is the perpetual regeneration of competitive advantage. Steps include structural redesign, testing of procedures, and reassessment of traditional thought processes.¹ Their approach presents both a challenge and an opportunity for those who hope to prosper in the 21st century.

An American institution that faces a critical need for self-assessment is higher education, specifically community colleges. Bergquist suggests that the millennium represents a shift from a modern to a postmodern structure. The difference will be an ever increasing reliance on technology and information in the latter instance. He is convinced that successful community colleges "situated in an emerging postmodern world" must build on their existing infrastructure "while . . . inventing new forms and formulating new perspectives that include aspects drawn from both

constructs."² An essential aspect of the integration will be to challenge the traditional assumptions of college missions and the established perspectives regarding the assessment of organizational quality and effectiveness. Both concepts must be realigned to bring into focus the "value-added" criteria that emphasize integration of internal and external stakeholder expectations. The approach allows the college to be a community builder, an agent for synergy within the service area. Is there another critical incident that influences the transition?

Argyris suggests that a characteristic of the 21st century is "boundary creep." New technology "informalizes" the flow of information across organizations. The result is that boundaries are becoming increasingly diffuse. Functions traditionally performed by one group are now the province of numerous ones.³ Bergquist agrees. His approach defines community colleges as "intersect organizations." Personnel are engaged in building consensus regarding mission and accountability among ever more diverse constituencies. He suggests that colleges will be required to operate in "a gestalt environment and [tolerate] considerable ambiguity."⁴ Clearly, the contexts in which community colleges operate are changing. What models exist to assist college personnel in shifting the scenarios used to engage change?

Stakeholders, Benchmarks, and the New Accountability

The Consortium for Community College Development located at the University of Michigan has developed an open systems

structure designed to allow colleges to engage change and "fundamentally redefine the relationship among teachers, staff, students [internal stakeholders] and external stakeholders."⁵ One outcome of the structure will be a comprehensive assessment of the full range of benefits rendered by the college to its service area. Consortium researchers report that effectiveness can become a strategy if it is used for establishing distinctiveness and identifying niches in a time of turbulent markets. What must be developed is a new "effectiveness package" that contains benchmarks that measure internal and external stakeholder accomplishment and satisfaction. The "new accountability" will be based on a "complex web of explicit and implicit transactions" that define the responsibility that exists between the college and its markets. The definition of market is radically altered. It is a group of stakeholders, inside or outside the college, that has a vested interest in performance.⁶ If this definition is accepted and woven into the college's effectiveness package, then the institution will develop the ability to engage the needs and expectations of multiple constituencies. What steps must be taken to implement the "new accountability"?

Roueché, Johnson, Roueché, et al., conducted a national study of 200 community colleges in 1996. The purpose was to redefine the core concepts of accountability, effectiveness, and assessment; provide the components of a design to engage the emerging "new accountability"; and present a challenge to

community colleges as they struggle to maintain their niche in American higher education.⁷

The definitions are useful: "accountability is the act of being responsible to various publics external to the college for [mission] implementation; . . . effectiveness is an internal strategy for planning and evaluation that generates data which the college can use to determine if it is matching its performance to its purpose; and assessment expands the effectiveness strategy by determining the degree to which the college is meeting present performance standards."⁸

The components of the design emerge from the definitions:

- Establish an expanded statement of institutional purpose.
- Identify intended educational, research, service, and administrative objectives and outcomes.
- Assess the extent to which the intended objectives and outcomes are being accomplished.
- Adjust institutional mission, objectives, and outcomes based on the assessment findings.⁹

The essential design effectively circumscribes the "new accountability." What is the nature of the challenge facing community colleges?

Roueche, Johnson, Roueche, et al., report a declining confidence in the ability of community colleges to deliver on the promises inherent in their mission. They suggest that colleges "must not only respond to the letter of the law on the policy regarding accountability and effectiveness, they must embrace both as opportunities to define more clearly who they are and to describe more specifically the value they add to their students

and their communities."¹⁰ The challenge is clear; is any college system engaging it through adoption/adaptation of the design?

The Maryland Model: Hagerstown Community College, A Case Study

Five years ago, the Maryland Higher Education Commission developed a benchmark/accountability model, which captures the dimension of the Roueche, Johnson, Roueche paradigm. There are twenty-six components that allow colleges to empirically demonstrate the value that they add to their internal stakeholders--students, faculty, staff; and external stakeholders--businesses, industries, and agencies. Further, the model is objective in that it surveys stakeholder satisfaction in a manner that keeps the process external to the college. Data is returned to individual colleges as component measures of their effectiveness. Colleges are expected to modify their "effectiveness packages" based on the synergy of mission, objectives, and outcomes. General reaction to the design has been positive from both internal and external stakeholders. It is important to evaluate the process using a single institution case study to provide clarity.

Hagerstown Community College (HCC) has been a participant in the process since its inception. While the results have not been perfect, the college is meeting stakeholder expectations. More importantly, it has undertaken major reorganization as a strategic initiative to align more closely stakeholder needs and college objectives. Also, the process allows college personnel to pinpoint areas of strength and those in need of further

development. The following data analysis provides insight into the substance of the "new accountability."

Hagerstown Community College is classified as a small institution in the Maryland taxonomy. The assessment provides a database and multiple comparisons. College results are compared with a summary of the other five small colleges, which are defined as HCC's peers. Further, a summary of all eighteen state systems is provided. In modifying its accountability system, HCC uses both comparisons as well as analyzing its core data. Through the 90s, the results have made a significant contribution to evolutionary change in an institution that is over half a century old.

The most useful indicators are those that reflect a synergy among various stakeholders. Eight generic categories are presented because they blend the expectations of faculty, staff, and students--internal stakeholders; and employees--external stakeholders. The result is an emerging engagement of the "new accountability."

OUTCOME I:

Was your most important goal achieved by the time you graduated from [HCC]?

	<u>College</u>	<u>Peer</u>	<u>State</u>
Yes	84.3%	82.2%	84.2%
No	15.7%	17.8%	15.8%

OUTCOME II:

To what extent was your understanding of, clarification of, or attention to the following areas improved or increased?

	<u>College</u>	<u>Peer</u>	<u>State</u>
Improved understanding: science/technology	56.1%	57.5%	54.4%
Increased attention to news and world events	39.5%	36.5%	35.3%
Clarified education and/or career goals	70.2%	67.4%	66.6%
Increased knowledge of other cultures/periods of history	40.1%	34.1%	36.8%
Increased enjoyment of learning	64.4%	60.8%	64.9%

OUTCOME III:

	<u>College</u>	<u>Peer</u>	<u>State</u>
Quality of classroom instruction	91.8%	91.7%	90.4%

OUTCOME IV:

	<u>College</u>	<u>Peer</u>	<u>State</u>
Faculty availability/ helpfulness	82.2%	87.7%	82.4%

OUTCOME V:

	<u>College</u>	<u>Peer</u>	<u>State</u>
Tutorial services	68.7%	68.3%	66.4%

OUTCOME VI:

	<u>College</u>	<u>Peer</u>	<u>State</u>
Job placement services	44.4%	41.8%	42.1%

OUTCOME VII:

	<u>College</u>	<u>Peer</u>	<u>State</u>
Over-all quality of college	88.6%	87.7%	87.9%
Would you attend this college again? (Yes)	92.4%	85.3%	88.6%

These seven outcomes present a synergy among internal stakeholders--faculty, staff, and students. Alfred suggests that these results reflect an "intimacy with clients." Faculty and staff "reach out and identify needs and find ways to help [students] achieve important goals."¹¹ Further, while the scores are good, there is room for improvement and the college's effectiveness package must address processes for change.

The next set of indicators provides a synergy between external and internal stakeholders. The employer follow-up survey presents outcomes assessments on student preparation two years after graduation. Appendix A reflects the nine preparation areas. They average 93.5% in the very good/good categories. The tenth category, over-all preparation for employment, is a useful comparative measure. The very good/good total was 92.1%. Overall, external stakeholders are satisfied with employees recruited from HCC.

Three other indicators provide further insights into external stakeholder satisfaction.

- A. Was graduate's specific program of study an important factor in the employment decision?
- | | |
|-------------------|--------------|
| -- very important | 44.7% |
| -- important | <u>28.9%</u> |
| | 73.6% |
- B. In appropriate circumstances, how likely is the employer to hire another graduate from this . . . program?
- | | |
|------------------|--------------|
| -- highly likely | 40.5% |
| -- likely | <u>46.0%</u> |
| | 86.5% |
- C. For a similar job . . . , would employer recommend that other employers hire a graduate of this program?
- | | |
|-----------------------|--------------|
| -- strongly recommend | 40.5% |
| -- recommend | <u>54.1%</u> |
| | 94.6% |

These eight generic categories provide data that allow HCC to implement an effectiveness package that will meet the expectations of internal and external stakeholders. Further, the college is positioned to maintain its niche in a period of unpredictable and turbulent change. What other dimensions of the college's system will require modification to better meet the challenges of the millennium?

Conclusion: Toward Accountability--The New Response

In the conclusion of their national study of effectiveness and the community college, Roueche, Johnson, and Roueche, et al., present four serious indictments:

- ♦ Colleges are not . . . tying . . . mission to expected outcomes.
- ♦ The overwhelming majority . . . are not engaged in data collection activities that . . . tell them whether or not they are accomplishing their mission.

- ◆ Colleges do not appear to understand (or, perhaps, simply do not know how to make) the critical link between mission and effectiveness.
- ◆ Student learning-related indicators are not routinely tracked although student performance after transfer was identified as an emerging issue.¹²

The Maryland system in general and HCC specifically are a contrast to these findings. The Maryland model has gone beyond the design presented by Roueche, Johnson, Roueche, et al., to implement an open systems approach. Carter of the Consortium for Community College Development, University of Michigan, presents a five step framework for implementing an open system.¹³ The HCC case study reflects the utility of the process.

○ **Engage the Community College/Raise Institutional Awareness**

HCC conducted a collegewide assessment of institutional accountability. A questionnaire sent to all college employees, focus groups, and a reorganization task force provided a design adopted by the college to initiate systemic change.

○ **Establish Stabilizing Touchstones**

The college formulated a statement of core values (see Appendix B). They are being validated using a colloquium/stakeholder focus group process. Further, the Maryland accountability/benchmark system is being used as a base for establishing short-term and long-term goals and objectives.

○ **Increase Intracollege Linkages**

The college is using cross functional teams to assess the impact of core values as well as to clarify the expectations of internal and external stakeholders. A planning council, established as an outcome of the reorganization effort, is responsible for formative assessment and integration.

○ **Create Opportunities for Innovation**

The planning council is undertaking an institutional systems review and redesign. The initiative began with a comprehensive restructuring of college budget building processes. A part of the Middle States reaccreditation process known as the Periodic Review Report is being used as a tool to identify and revise constraining regulations and procedures. The goal is to increase the sense of process ownership by internal stakeholders.

○ **Provide Appropriate Resources and Support**

Along with transforming the budgeting process, college personnel are implementing a professional development plan that will synthesize a "generative" approach to change. A leadership institute has been established to serve the needs of internal and external stakeholders. Training is scheduled for faculty and staff in diversity, the needs/expectations of ADA clients, and occupational language skills to assist

multicultural clients. Carter concludes with the suggestion that an open system requires "a shift in emphasis from teaching to learning and from curriculum-centered programs to learner-centered [ones]. It implies that responsiveness and customer service are priorities. [Essentially], a solid and well thought through framework for the college's transformation and a systematic and integrated set of tactics . . . designed to support the process"¹⁴ must be implemented. HCC is in the second year of its transition to an open system design that accepts the "new accountability" and uses its tenets to prepare for success in the 21st century. Roueche, Johnson, and Roueche, et al., conclude their study with the recommendation that "colleges can get better by embracing the effectiveness tiger, acknowledging that the major issues . . . demand our attention, and creating the most viable plans that can be written in the best interests of the institution and student."¹⁵ HCC's two years of experience with an empirical, open systems design suggests that the approach, while difficult, has the potential for generative change.

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APPENDIX A

PREPARATION OF HCC GRADUATES

	Very Good		Good		Fair		Poor	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Knowledge of Specific Technical Job Skills	20	54.1	15	40.5	2	5.4	0	0.0
Familiarity with Equipment Required for Job	17	44.7	18	47.4	2	5.3	1	2.6
Ability to Learn on the Job	29	76.3	8	21.1	1	2.5	0	0.0
Writing Skills	16	42.1	18	47.4	3	7.9	1	2.6
Oral Communication Skills	21	55.3	15	39.5	2	5.2	0	0.0
Ability to Solve Problems Related to Job	21	55.3	15	39.5	2	5.2	0	0.0
Reading and Comprehension Skills	20	52.7	17	44.7	1	2.6	0	0.0
Math Skills	18	48.7	16	43.2	2	5.4	1	2.7
Computer Skills	14	37.8	19	51.4	2	5.4	2	5.4
Overall Preparation for Employment	19	50.0	16	42.1	3	7.9	0	0.0

APPENDIX B

HAGERSTOWN COMMUNITY COLLEGE

CORE VALUES

Core Value #1 - HCC is First and Foremost a Learning Community

HCC is an institution whose focus is on students and the quality of student learning. As a learner centered college, the faculty and staff of HCC will concentrate resources on the learning needs of our students and our community through its programs, policies, and practices.

Core Value #2 - HCC is People

HCC recognizes the value and contributions of each member of the College community. Acknowledging the power of leadership by example in our relationships with our students and one another, we demand the highest competence, integrity, honesty, dependability, and courage.

Core Value #3 - HCC Extends Opportunity

HCC provides promising opportunities for all individuals. A strength of the College is the ability to develop unique opportunities for a wide range of students.

Core Value #4 - HCC's Educational and Training Programs Result in Better Lives

The educational programs of HCC improve the quality of life and the worth of individuals. The quality and attractiveness of our community are enhanced and therefore, our community becomes a better place to work and to live.

Core Value #5 - HCC is a Means of Connection

We are linked to other organizations in our community. HCC is at the center of a complex learning system linking many organizations with educational functions.

- Many of our learners' educational activities are concurrent with employment and civic activities. They participate in other organizations.
- Many full-time and adjunct faculty are active in the practice of their trade and profession. This provides further links or connections with other parts of the learning system.
- HCC has established positive collaborative relationships with school systems, colleges, and universities.
- HCC is connected and communicates with county and city government, Chambers of Commerce, Economic Development Commissions, federal and state agencies, business and industry, community service organizations, and the media.